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UNCLAS BANGKOK 006001

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

GENEVA FOR RMA, DEPT FOR PRM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI NOT DEPORTING PETCHABOON HMONG, YET

REF: BANGKOK 005146

1. (SBU) Summary. Contrary to rumors circulating among NGOs, the RTG is not currently deporting the nearly six thousand ethnic Hmong living in Petchaboon province. The RTG is cooperating with UNHCR's efforts to determine which Hmong may qualify as refugees and for resettlement, but clearly plans to deport the majority after UNHCR is finished. Post has conveyed our concerns about the situation to both senior and working-level Thai officials, who have said that deportation is not imminent and that a number of the Hmong are willing to return to Laos now that they realize there is no US resettlement program. End Summary.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE STIRS RUMOR POT

2. (SBU) An article in the English-language daily Bangkok Post on 15 September ignited a new round of rumors that the RTG plans to forcibly deport the nearly six thousand Hmong encamped in Petchaboon province (see Ref for background on this group). The Post reported that the RTG had approved a budget for repatriating the Hmong, and that the Petchaboon Governor was "awaiting the order" to commence the deportation. This article coincided with rumors that Thai police and/or military were already moving to push the Hmong towards the Thai/Lao border and reports that several Thai of Hmong ethnicity had been arrested (Note, in a sign of either efficient-as-usual Thai bureaucracy or artful denial, the governor's office plead ignorance of the article and requested that we fax them a copy. End Note).

UNHCR MOVING AHEAD WITH INTERVIEWS

3. (SBU) Acting Refcoord contacted Deputy UNHCR Representative Raja Panday on 15 September to discuss the Hmong situation. Panday stated that he had seen the Bangkok Post article and was likewise concerned about the plight of the Hmong, but had not heard any other solid information on possible RTG deportation plans. UNHCR has been working with the RTG to determine which Hmong may have legitimate refugee claims and plans to send interview teams to Petchaboon in the next several days. Panday agreed to keep us informed of their findings.

CONVEYING OUR CONCERN TO THE RTG

4. (SBU) Charge d'Affaires spoke with NSC Deputy Secretary General Prakrit Prachonpachanuk on 15 September to convey our concern and to urge the RTG to maintain its dialogue with UNHCR on the issue. Prakrit replied that he understands our concern and that the NSC continues to discuss the Hmong situation. The Charge asked that RTG keep us apprised of key developments.

5. (SBU) In a separate conversation 16 September, acting Refcoord spoke with a working-level NSC contact, who emphasized that a key dynamic in any decision will be ensuring the safety of the Hmong involved. According to this official, a number of Hmong had been misled by "some people" claiming that either the RTG was willing to allow them to settle in Thailand, or that the USG was planning a new repatriation program. Now that both rumors have proven false, a sizable number of Hmong are willing to return to Laos but "want us (the Thai) to do it."

6. (SBU) That said, according to this contact, a large group of Hmong refuse to return, and the RTG will have to apply applicable immigration laws. When pressed on the modalities of enforcing these laws, this official said that the RTG will have to "wait for awhile" before moving forward, but pledged to keep Post informed of any planned deportation.

COMMENT

7. (SBU) The RTG repatriation/deportation of the Hmong

appears inevitable at some point in the future but is on hold for the time being. We will continue to seek a better understanding of the situation on the ground and press our government contacts to ensure they cooperate with UNHCR and handle this situation in a humane manner.

ARVIZU